/59 cont./

the bloody element, which for all primitive people and for all children is a synomym for vigor, spirit, and health. This step is really critical; frequently it is feared, it is surrounded with mystery, and in many cases even goes so far as to produce hysteria and mental disorders; and it is frequently the point of departure for many disturbances both organic and moral. Thus, in both senses did Father Vilariño, S. J., say that the age between 14 and 24 years was the decade of death.

125. The Pemón distinguish in a girl three ages: true girlhood, in which she is muré; an intermediate one, in which she is /60/ manak-dakán, when her breasts are about to appear; and puberty, in which she is auroni-pué, in which menstruation has occurred.

126. This third age is one of confinement and diet for a more or less long period. The Pemón do not build special ranchos apart for these pubescent girls, but small apartments within the common house itself, or, more exactly, garrets as in high habitations. It seems that formerly the confinement and diet were more rigorous and prolonged; now they are only observed in the two or three first manifestations of menstruation.

According to notes of my native collaborator, Ernesto Pinto Armellada, which I have before me, among the principal foodstuffs prohibited to pubescent girls were moriche worms, turkey hens, deer, etc., in order to avoid bad childbirth; in addition, salt and sweetness, so that their teeth will not be damaged, since it is already known that "formerly women chewed kachirí."

127. The object of this confinement is not making them pale nor to keep them away from men's glances, but to preserve them from the assaults of lustful or lovesick spirits, such as amariuak, rató, mayikó, rató, etc.

When detailing the observances prescribed by the ancients for this age in women, it is said that:

a) they must lie down in the hammock in the straightest position possible;

/60 cont./

881 [302] b) they must paint the face and the whole body with annatto in order to cover up the yellowness and not become prey to amariuak;

881 784 c) they must not raise their eyes nor look toward the hills, where they think the mauarí live;

d) they must not bathe nor go for water, in order not to be perhaps possessed by rató;

[292] e) they must use moriche sandals whenever, out of necessity, they must put their feet on the ground;

f) they must abstain, as has been said above, from certain foodstuffs.

881 128. There are two somewhat more curious things while the indisposition lasts, and they are: absolute silence, to which they are constrained, and whipping, which they are given each time they come in or go out of the rancho for some necessity.

881 841 521 The Indians insist on saying that the speech of a menstruating Indian woman is extremely pernicious; for that reason no one speaks to them; and when the days have passed and she wishes to return to daily conversation, the woman must address a stick and say to it: "Are you here?" Then the tree will dry up and the same thing will happen to any Indian man to whom she addresses herself. /61/ "This," Ernesto writes, "seems not to be true, but it certainly is their custom."

881 The whipping is not in any way at all a flagellation nor anything like it; it is only a ceremony, which is done by the old woman who is caring for the girl every time the latter goes out of the rancho, so that the evil spirits may consider her to be something scornful. One day after the indisposition has passed, at dawn when the cocks crow, they bring her down from the hammock, seat her on a little bench, and the oldest man or the master of the house flails her with some strings made of [593] moriche fiber and recites over her a certain charm. "By means of this whipping," adds Ernesto, "when the women get angry with their daughters for being hard to manage, they customarily

881 593 /61 cont./ say: Let her be, for when she reaches puberty they will whip her."

881 538 129. In order to demonstrate that women must submit to these traditional observances, the Pemón have a great number of stories and legends in which it is said, for example:

a) That a girl, during the days of the retreat, went to the river to get water and began to play with a little fish which was tickling her feet, without knowing that it was a disguised rató, and became pregnant to the astonishment of her parents, who knew that she had had no dealings with men. That was the origin of the legendary Apichauai.

b) That another girl in similar circumstances without thinking took down a birds' nest with its little eggs, which were not eggs of a bird but snake's eggs, as a result of which she became the mother of Aramarí, another legendary personage, half man and half snake.

c) That another girl in the same circumstances went to a bachaquero /evidently from bachaco, an antlike insect/ with other Indians at the time of the gathering of those and that she was eaten from the waist down by the keuchí, a kind of swallow which hunts bachacos at the time of their swarming and their egg-laying.

d) That another girl, who went to the river when the other Indians were poisoning fish with verbasco, began to prepare sakura and with the waste matter that she threw in the water caused such a disturbance among the mauaríes that they caused a great flood from which only a few were able to save themselves in the forks of trees, etc.

881 304 130. In this same period they customarily submit both the boys as well as the girls to incisions, or papuek, with which they tattoo themselves, not for beauty but in order to pour into the said incisions vegetable substances so that they will be good hunters, so that they will be diligent, so that they will not fall from their mounts when riding, so that they will be good chewers of kachirí, so that they will be assiduous, etc.